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AUTHOR Fisher, Lawrence
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ABSTRACT

Junior High School (JHS) teachers were interviewed to determine their criteria for competent and incompetent student behavior in school and their verbatim statements were adapted into questionnaire format. Two hundred and eleven male students were rated on competence in 15 classrooms by their teachers and a series of factor analytic procedures yielded the following independently replicated factors: academic competence, intrusiveness, social avoidance and dependency/immaturity. A rational factor of extreme behaviors such as cheating, or talking of self as ugly or stupid, was also included. When compared to findings of previous studies results indicate that JHS teachers tend to view competence as more related to social and emotional abilities than to elementary school teachers, who have been found to emphasize competence as compliance with institutional demands. The data indicate that JHS teachers have a relatively stable conceptual framework from which they "view" the competence of male students and that this framework is replicable in a variety of teacher groups. Test-retest reliability data is given. (Author/RH)

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# Teacher Judgments of Competence of Male Junior High School Students

Lawrence Fisher, Ph.D.
University of Rochester

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Requests for reprints should be sent to:

Dr. Lawrence Fisher, Ph.D.
Department of Psychiatry
University of Rochester
School of Medicine and Dentistry
Rochester, New York 14642

PS011161

ABSTRACT

Junior High School teachers were interviewed to determine their criteria for school competence, and their verbatum statements were adapted into questionnaire format. 211 male students were rated and a series of factor analytic procedures yielded the following independently replicated factors: academic competence, intrusiveness, social avoidance and dependency/immaturity. A rational factor of extreme behaviors was also included. Junior High School teachers tend to view competence as more related to social and emotional abilities than elementary school teachers, who emphasize competence as compliance with institutional demands. Test-retest reliability is presented and discussed.

TEACHER JUDGMENTS OF COMPETENCE
OF MALE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Rubenstein and Fisher (1974) have identified a series of dimensions of competence as judged from the separate and personal perspectives of elementary school teachers in the school setting. The present study attempted to identify the conceptual framework junior high school (JHS) teachers use for judging competence within their classrooms (Goldfrield & D'Zurilla, 1969). Competence was defined as the criteria for successful behavior employed by the individuals who operate within the social setting. In this sense, judgments of and criteria for competent behavior may vary among groups of individuals which occupy different social positions within the setting. Hence, students may be judged differently by teachers and by peers, and each group may base their judgments upon different conceptual frameworks.

Small group meetings with 24 academic teachers from a suburban middle class JHS were held. Teachers were asked through a variety of structured and open ended questions to discuss their view of com-

petent and incompetent behavior, and 18 hours of tape recordings were made. These were reviewed in detail and 153 verbatim phrases used to describe such behavior were extracted. These were refined and shortened with duplications of content eliminated, and 89 descriptors were prepared in scale form. These descriptors were then submitted to a different group of 15 teachers from the same school during the next academic year. They were asked to rate all male students in one of their classes on the 89 items.

The data on 211 rated students were then submitted to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation as a total group and as two replication groups of 105 and 106 Ss each. No differences in factor structure emerged when grades 7 and 8 were run separately.

A 4 factor rotation was selected as containing the largest number of meaningful factors. The first is a bimodal factor with an essentially normal distribution of scores. The remaining factors are unimodal and, as expected, the scores distribute with moderate positive skew. Twenty-two of the 89 items were selected having met the following criteria: (1) factor loading of .45 or higher, (2) correlation of .40 or lower with

all other factors, and (3) replication of above rules in both subsamples. Because 3 of 5 items in factor 4 did not meet the above criteria and because the subsamples were small relative to the number of items in the scale, a separate group of 8 teachers from a second middle class, suburban JHS were asked to rate a total of 151 male students. These data were submitted to the same analysis and criteria for item selection, and the same 22 items emerged in the replication sample as in the original sample. In addition, a review of items with communalities less than .30 yielded a rational factor comprised of 7 descriptors of extreme and infrequent behaviors. The following 4 statistical, replicated factors accounted for 43.7% of the variance in the original 89 item scale and 56.5% of the variance in a condensed scale using only the selected items:

Factor 1: academic competence (8 items, 28.0% variance). This factor reflects the student's ability in cognitive areas and work habits, e.g., getting good grades and organizing school work.

Factor 2: intrusiveness (5 items, 11.9% variance). A student scoring high on this factor often interrupts, lashes out at others and teases.

He is seen by teachers as openly clashing with others in the classroom.

Factor 3: social avoidance (4 items, 10.0% variance). This factor reflects the quiet, at times sullen and unhappy student who works alone and tends to avoid contact with peers.

Factor 4: dependency/immaturity (5 items, 6.6% variance). This factor reflects the childish student who likes to sit near the teacher and who behaves like an elementary school child. He likes the teacher's attention and is often quite upset if he makes a mistake.

Factor 5: extreme behaviors (7 items, rational factor). This factor is comprised of items with communalities less than .30, all of which reflect extreme behaviors. In a classroom of "normal students", these behaviors should occur infrequently and hence, such items display low variance. When they do occur, however, they may be pathognomic. Illustrative items are: appears tense and nervous, cheats, talks of self as ugly or stupid, and frequently withdraws.

Since only 4 of the 29 test items

reflect positive behaviors, 6 positive filler items were added to the questionnaire. This 35 item scale was then administered to a new group of 6 teachers from a suburban middle class junior high school and was readministered 4 weeks later. The test retest reliability (n=76) was .82, .76, .58, .67, and .55 for factors 1 through 5 respectively. The low reliability for factor 5 was expected since it is comprised of isolated extreme behaviors rather than a single, coherent dimension.

In comparing elementary with JHS teacher views of competence, two issues emerge: reliability and structure. From Rubenstein and Fisher's (1974) data, elementary school teachers displayed a mean test-retest reliability of .77 whereas the mean coefficient for JHS teachers was .69. It would be expected that during a period of major developmental change, school behavior may also be quite variable and inconsistent. Also, teachers commented on their reluctance to score many of these 12 to 14 year old students negatively because the behavior in question varied substantially over time. Hence, the variability of the behavior itself most likely contributed to the relatively lower

reliability of the JHS scale. Analyses focusing on students who display different degrees of variability are now underway.

With respect to structure, Rubenstein and Fisher (1974) reported 4 dimensions teachers use in observing the competence of elementary school males; social compliance, social competence, cognitive competence, and motivation. JHS teachers, in contrast, appear to focus more on specific aspects of interpersonal behavior than on broad dimensions relating to institutional demands. It would appear that from the teachers perspective, competence in JHS is related to aspects of social and emotional maturity as well as academic success; whereas similar behaviors do not seem as heavily emphasized in elementary school.

The data indicate that JHS teachers have a relatively stable conceptual framework from which they "view" the competence of male students and that this framework is replicable in a variety of teacher groups. As demonstrated in related research (Rubenstein & Fisher, 1974, 1975; Fisher, in press), groups of individuals occupying important social roles in a given setting employ defineable dimensions and frameworks for observing the competence of others.

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